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Abstract

Self-acceptance: research into the state of human self-acceptance. The work explores the process from human feelings of emptiness to self-acceptance. The research culminated in an exhibition of sculptures held at the Canberra School of Art Foyer Gallery from March 4 to 13, 2004. The exhibition is the outcome of the Studio Practice component, and together with the Studio Report, documents the nature of study undertaken.

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Contents

Introduction 1

 Subject, Shape, Space

Individual pieces14

 The earlier work

 The body of work

 Conclusion

Addenda36

 Bibliography

 The approved study program

 C.V.

Introduction

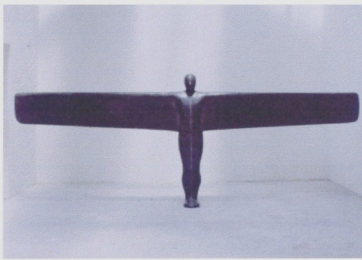
There is only one small Japanese Tatami room in the house I grew up in — my parent's bedroom. Nothing else could qualify as traditionally Japanese. It seems natural that my personal interests have attended to western culture and aesthetics, having grown up in such a westernized house, designed by my father. My experiences through the exchange program to the Canberra School of Art (1999 to 2000) was mostly because of my urge to directly study western art and culture.

Where does the meaning lie in making art? This question emerged from the sculptural process when I was half way through the exchange program. At that point, there was neither consistent subject matter nor concrete necessity in my personal concept to keep producing objects. The created works that I spent effort and time on, seemed superficially manipulated objects rather than sculptural pieces containing the essence of art. The continuation of making objects without finding any self-explanation for the essence of the sculptural piece and the necessity of creating, caused me to feel distressed and irritated. Consequently, these contradictory thoughts led to feelings of 'hollowness and nothingness.' However, these feelings caught a personal interest: if the process of making objects caused these feelings, perhaps investigating the feelings themselves would help me to understand and find a way to dissolve the feelings, which is I have named here as self-acceptance. I discovered that this concept may be useful not only for sculptural development, but also in my personal life. Thus, these feelings became the personal subject. Moreover, the investigation of the subject turned into a desire to create.

The idea started with my own personal experience of 'hollowness and nothingness.' But, the subject spread from a personal matter to a broader understanding that exists in society, especially considering my Japanese background. The social hierarchy and uniform education which exists in Japanese society seems to have created a mass of conformists. It is difficult to retain one's unique identity in such an environment, because uniqueness stands out. As a result, the conformists continue to reproduce. It is unnecessary to build an individual thought as long as one follows surrounding opinion, so having no need to disagree, argue or fight, seems satisfactory to everyone. However, people in society tend to struggle when they try to find individual interests, identity or sometimes their existence. This is the idea that I will discuss.

In the sculptural process, considering negative and positive space is indispensable to the subject of creating three-dimensional objects. It is impossible to describe this personal idea without referring to the influence of the English sculptor, Antony Gormley.

In 1999 (my third year at the Seika University) there was a project called Homage. Every student involved chose an artist they felt influenced or inspired by, and replicated one of their works. The project brief instructed the students to follow the artistic process using the same materials and methods as the original artist. I chose Gormley's work, *A case for an Angel III* 1990. While researching his work and addressing the concept of casting his body, I found an astonishing comment which inspired me to consider the surface of objects. Gormley said, "The whole project is to make the work from the inside rather than to manipulate it from the outside and use the whole mind/body mechanism as an instrument [...] The best work comes from a complete moment which is a realization."¹ Because of his profound life (studying Buddhism in India from 1971 to 1974) he sees this process as meditation. This comment became a key aspect for consideration in my personal perspective of space, and its inner force in an object. Since this research, my personal interest in space has deepened.



Antony Gormley
A case for an Angel III, 1990
1970 x 5260 x 350 cm

This project proceeded my research into the human condition of 'hollowness and nothingness', which is caused in human constructed space. This investigation will hopefully lead to the understanding of the ultimate goal, self-acceptance. The project started with a personal interest in Buddhist philosophy.

¹ Hutchinson, John. Gombrich, E.H. Njatin, Lela B. Antony Gormley. London, Phaidon, 1995, p.20

Spending more time delving into sculptural creativity in an overseas country caused a deeper realization about my own personal origin. Japanese culture, perspective and aesthetics were a part of me, stuck in my body, my very fibres of being. My initial intention in studying overseas was to internalise the western aesthetics, but this realization brought a personal viewpoint back to the question: where did my perspective come from? Ironically, to explore the nature of personal artistic context, traditional Japanese perception needed to be reviewed.

Subject

In 2001, the initial concept covered the social matter of human negative feelings of 'hollowness and nothingness.' Then, the concept evolved to explore human conditions of feeling: avoiding the reality, distressing situations, conflicting feelings — all products of a conformist society. At the conclusion of the MVA program in 2002, my investigation concluded that the feelings of 'hollowness and nothingness' are caused by self-negation. The final presented work of the MVA program, *Soundless screaming* 2002, encompassed the whole notion of the investigation of the human feelings of 'hollowness and nothingness.' From these elements emerged the final work. This investigation was coming to an end by that time, because it seemed I had reached the limit of pursuing the subject. There seemed to be nothing gained from continuing with this concept.



Soundless screaming
2002
forged steel
51.5 x 310 x 189.5 cm

Researching Buddhist philosophy further expanded these ideas. In Buddhism, it is defined: life is suffering. Considering life as comfort is nothing less than avoiding reality. Buddhism explains that avoiding suffering is impossible. This religion was initiated to resolve individual awareness of suffering and the recognition of the reality particularly from a mental aspect. Through the methods of analyzing each fundamental suffering, Buddhism tries to penetrate the essence of suffering. Preventing individuals from escaping those fundamentals, it consequently suggests a completely peaceful mind is the key to a complete feeling of pleasure. Thus, Buddhism exists as a doctrine that tells the ways and means of how to attain the state of self-acceptance. Such attempts to attain self-acceptance seem similar to my personal idea. By analyzing the psychological process, it is possible to suggest ways and means to avoid or dissolve these negative feelings of 'hollowness and nothingness.' This is the starting point of my investigation of self-acceptance.

The concept itself needed to be ordered to establish what was clear and what was not. This idea provided a basis for looking at the process by which people sink into feelings of 'hollowness and nothingness' The following cues may lead on, into a staged process of self-destruction.

- Feelings of lost time, labor and/or effort
- Pressure caused by expectations from society, and anxiety about being unable to fulfill these expectations
- Conflicting beliefs
- Self-distrust
- The feeling of lacking the physical and/or mental capacity to produce a desired result.

At this stage, these feelings are motives, they do not necessarily directly lead to the feeling of 'hollowness and nothingness.' However, such motives may possibly induce the next process. In looking at this process I have set out a hypothetical situation.

1. Fast dejection: this is the feeling of disappointment or even regret about a situation and condition. But there is still hope in it, so the person confronts the situation less realistically.
2. Short-term avoiding: this situation is denied because of the hope. The problem is shifted from the person themselves to their surroundings. In this case the effect avoids the situation completely.
3. The second disappointment occurs when the problem is shifted back to the person concerned, and they condemn themselves. In the course of time, self-antipathy develops, which causes the feelings of discouragement, distress and conflict.
4. Self-negation: here the feeling turns into a questioning of personal human value. If they fail the human value, they doubt their existence. This stage is the beginning of the feelings of 'hollowness and nothingness.'
5. 'hollowness and nothingness' (a condition of splitting between the body and mind). Here, at the extreme, the individual falls into a feeling of self-negation: it separates the body and mind. Consequently, the body exists in the reality without the mind. This state of mind is about 'hollowness and nothingness.'

The idea for developing this hypothetical situation came from my reading "five stages of dying" by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.²

By following this process I determined that the human feeling of 'hollowness and nothingness' seemed to originate in stage four. Four and five are closely related. Hence it is possible, to avoid getting into feelings of 'hollowness and nothingness', by stopping the process at stage three.

How can humans be redeemed from such feelings? This became the focus for my work and as a creator, my intention is to concentrate on making tools for human contemplation and meditation in order to achieve self-acceptance.

The subject, shape and space

To materialize this subject through the sculptural pieces, my personal expression needs to imply reality and a conformist society. The rectangular shape is a metaphor for reality. This shape seems very realistic and has a rational use in life, for example, one's living space and everyday objects. The world consists of a multitude of different rectangular shapes. The use of rectangular shapes reflects elements of human negative space in which we exist in our daily lives. The created works have to be exhibited inside of the architectural space. The vertical and the horizontal lines represented by the sculptural pieces as well as the architectural space become significant elements, creating an atmosphere of tension. The relationship between rectangular shapes emphasizes the carefully structured and ordered human space, which is the reality in which we exist.

Such an idea has been influenced by research into the minimalist sculptors, Donald Judd, Richard Artschwager, Carl Andre and Richard Serra. Previously, the surfaces of the objects were considered more than the surrounding space or inner force of the objects. What the viewers saw was the surface rather than the inside or even the space. The sculptural shapes depended on surface aesthetics only. But these sculptors were led to rethink the relationship

² Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. Kawaguchi, Shokichi: translation, *Shinushunukan*, Tokyo: Yomiurishuppansha, 1971

between an object and space, architectural rectangular space itself, how the object came to affect the space, and the distance between the object and the wall or ceiling.

Richard Serra's sculptures, which fill the surrounding space with massive tension by represented solid steel heaviness, led to a review of my personal perspective and what really affects our vision and understanding. This influence pushed the investigation of the quality of heaviness.

Another influence was Rachel Whiteread's sculpture, casting the space around everyday-objects, further encouraged the investigation of positive and negative space. The strategy she employs which transforms negative space into positive objects, mentally and physically confuses the viewer's perception of where they exist. Fiona Bradley describes her strategy, "to understand the space we are looking at we have to become the place from which it came. We are the doors which left their imprint on Closet and Ghost; we occupy the bath whose surrounding space confronts us in Untitled (Bath)."³

Consequently, my own work became more focused on the surrounding space and the inside of the object rather than the surface: for example, how the object transforms the space, and how the object changes the tension in the space. From this viewpoint the human body becomes a significant subject, as Richard Serra describes, "the only way to understand this work is to experience the place physically."⁴ To experience the space means to subconsciously measure the space with the body. In other words, the body is subconsciously engaged in the work as part of the work. Thus, the principal intention of creating the environment of the object is an invisible sound resonating in the air. And this invisible sound is personally comprehended as "space."

Space as a void

The concept of a void in the sculptural pieces is for contemplation and meditation. Putting one's head in the void space (the void being created by the heavy steel object) totally separates one from reality, and gives a sense of isolation which allows your mind space, a place of sanctuary. Israeli sculptor Dani Karavan says, "you see the things that you know,

³ Bradley, Fiona. Rachel Whiteread Shedding Life, London, Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1996, p. 14

⁴ Zweit, Armin. Richard Serra, 1998, p.8

that you can recognize. But the void, you cannot recognize. And so it is indispensable to create a kind of tension out of the void.”⁵ In my sculptural piece, *Avoiding 2001*, this concept is very obvious as it shows a human bust in positive, but viewers seldom recognize it in negative. However, that was the personal strategy for expanding the viewer’s imagination by representing the unrecognizable void. And it is more desirable to picture the viewer’s original concept in the void space, like someone had pictured sound in the void space. The void seems to have this inner quality, and it draws the viewer to consider what it is.

The idea of the shape

The whole idea of the shapes grew out of consideration of human positions for meditation or contemplation. Therefore, the completed objects were cast as the negative head shapes or channels of head shapes into rectangular steel shapes. The finished works are kind of tools — tools for preventing the separation between the body and mind. But the appearance of obvious functionality is carefully avoided. If the object is too explicit, it contains too much information, and the viewer conforms to the obvious meaning, without exploring further the hidden subtleties within their own interpretation. The works are expected to express both impressions — seemingly functional and non-functional, which simultaneously causes a feeling of familiarity and unfamiliarity. This contradiction of feelings attracts the viewer and makes them struggle to think what is confronting them. The feeling of familiarity draws the viewer’s attention to the work, and the feeling of unfamiliarity creates mystery surrounding the work promoting cause for further investigation. This, in turn, arouses the viewer’s imagination.

Finished works at this point exist as incidental objects like ash burned out from the earlier developed idea. So the earlier processes and methods are very important in terms of providing further progress in personal perception and philosophy: from this point, new ideas then emerged to produce the next piece. However, when viewers see the works, they will picture a different story from the intended concept. The concept is simply a cue to produce a work. There is no single way of understanding the work and no expectation on the viewer

⁵ Gibson, Michael. *Time, Space, Meditation Dani Karavan*, 1994, p.47

Methods and materials

Steel provides a sense of firmness, toughness, durability, and heaviness. The dark gray color of unpolished or forged steel has strong absorbency and reflective qualities which create uncanny tension and powerful existence in a space. Because of these qualities I continued to work with and explore the nature of the material. In later works I have focused on experimenting with ways of emphasising the quality of heaviness inherent in steel. Works completed in 2001 lacked depth because I was still exploring material. For example, the rectangular element in the sculptural piece, *Expectation* 2001, implies the notion of expectation from society. In that piece, the most important element was the attached point between the head and the steel sheet on a floor, which evokes the idea of the mass of social expectations pushing a person into the ground. But the rectangular shape seems too light, perhaps because of the distortion caused by the welding process, or something else that one can recognize as solid or hollow in quality without touching or looking inside. However, the intention of dealing with heaviness was to reveal stillness, tension and rigidity, as Richard Serra's sculpture does.

Expectation
2001
forged steel, steel sheet
51 x 240 x 240 cm



Following my experience with *Expectation* 2001, I decided to increase the thickness of the steel sheet from 2 millimeters to 3 millimeters in order to reduce the distortion through welding. A new strategy in craftsmanship was also adopted. To further enhance the look and feel of genuine solidity, the process of layering steel sheets was utilized in place of forging a single sheet. Moreover, by enlarging the object's point of attachment to the floor, it emphatically represents the universal law of gravity.

Working process

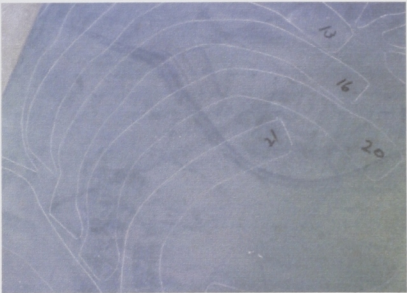
Casting the personal body.



Duplicating 4 busts out of plaster for many uses.
Partly cutting off the bust.



Making the patterns for the steel sheet. Sand the plaster bust, then draw the shape onto the steel sheet. The process is then repeated until the plaster piece is completely gone.



Cutting the steel sheet with the oxy/acetylene cutting torch. Because the torch is heavy, it is difficult to control when cutting, causing inaccuracy. This inaccuracy may cause a natural sense of texture rather than an artificial quality (Thus the texture has evolved as an integral part of the aesthetics of the piece, even though it began as an inaccuracy.)



Welding them together.



The process of shaving plaster with sandpaper, was a very unfamiliar and a psychologically potent experience. The solid plaster piece made from plaster powder was being transformed back into powder, its original substance. The process took time. It was a contemplative process, remembering personal past experiences and drawing a deeper understanding of each moment. When this long process was completed, there was nothing left of the object except the plaster powder. It was uncanny.

Meanwhile, this process has challenged personal questions of the meaning behind creating a sculptural piece by the artist's hands. In these days of developed technology, it seems ridiculous to spend so much effort and time in the creative process. Rather, spending more time utilizing the thinking process is seemingly far more valuable. There are always conflicting feelings between the personal attitude of hand making and the admiration for industrially well-made objects produced by the aforementioned Minimalists. The rectangular shape is very simple — industrially convenient to produce, and seems ridiculous to make painstakingly by hand. The desire for humans to create perfect three-dimensional shapes initiated the creation of machinery plus mass production — which in turn has brought about the loss of the significant quality — the human touch. Using the 'hand made' technique, the rectangular shape becomes less perfect, but somehow, retains a human element not apparent in machine-made objects.

INDIVIDUAL PIECES

Trap

Komoru

Tow stones

Sakushahumei

Structure structured

Chozuya

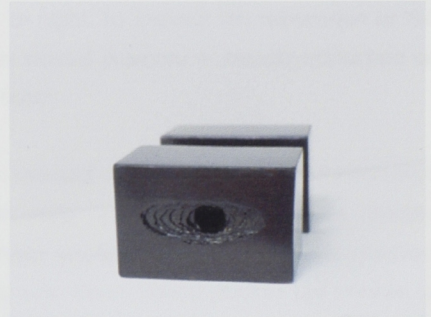
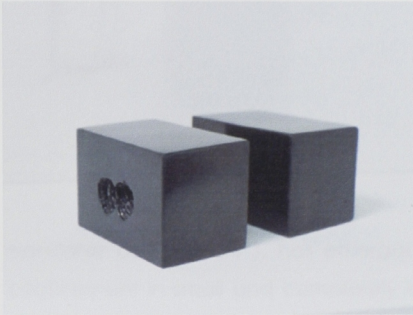
Hashi Hashi Hashi

Shosaihumei

Shoten

Trap

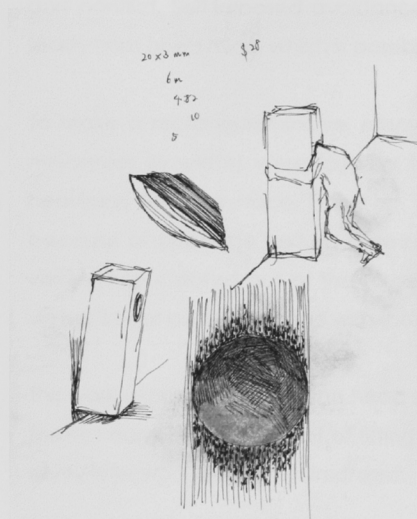
These two small solid blocks, created with many steel sheets, are the first of the earlier works. One is a hollowed out negative human bust. The other one is negative feet. This is the first time I use the process of layering steel sheets to create the physical weight of genuine solidity, also investigating the psychological weight or heaviness of human negative feelings. The other experiment was the texture caused by oxy/acetylene cutting. The organic texture contrasted strongly with the hard edges of the rectangular shapes. The geometrical process of layering each two-dimensional steel sheet to gradually create a three-dimensional hollowed space was an interesting paradox.



Trap
2003
mild steel
6.3 x 9.4 x 15 (cm)

At this point, the aim of the concept was unclear. The figurative shape, human head and shoulder, was still the same as the idea in 2001. There was a struggle whether to continue with the figurative shape or not, because it seemed repetitive. As a result, there was no conceptual development, but this work became a means of further exploring the idea of the heaviness of the steel. The texture effect created by oxy/acetylene cutting was a new discovery of an optical illusion created by working with steel.

KOMORU



In ancient Japan, there was no legend relating to configuration, because of their particular fear of the dark. They stayed inside when night comes, until sunrise. This fear is comprehended with reference to Japanese perception of soul: it was believed that the human soul, called TAMA, existed in the body, but can go in/out of the body. When Tama leaves the body, the person dies. They feared that the Tama seemed to spill through the body easily especially at night. To prevent this separation of the Tama, they stayed (Komoru — literally translated as 'retire') in huts.⁶

Today, an unusual phenomenon, called Hikikomori (from the verb 'Hikikomoru' — which literally translates as "seclude"), has emerged in Japanese society. Hikikomori is a self-imposed confinement in small and completely enclosed space. Many young people are unable to leave the sanctuary of their own room for long periods of time. They sever any connection to society and sometimes even their family.

The purpose of the work was to express the dilemma and distress evoked by the breakdown of social constructs as felt by people actually living in these circumstances. The individual creates the desire to cease existence from reality for self-release. This desire does not necessarily relate to the inclination of death, rather it is a form of hope to extinguish the body and mind from reality. It may be like a desire to shut the body and mind in a box which has no character and is unnoticeable.

In the sculptural piece, the size of the rectangular shape is smaller than the human body. So it is impossible to fit the human body in. This is reality, in the case of self-imposed psychological confinement such as Hikikomori, one tries to avoid reality, by attempting to put oneself in a box, but the physical constraints of size and shape make this impossible.

⁶ Isozaki, Arata, Mitatenuhou, Kashimashuppankai, 1990, p. 148, personal translation

Reality exists outside of the body, whilst true reality is perceived within the mind. The environment, self-confined or otherwise, is secondary to the state of internal confinement and conflict. Self-imposed avoidance of reality may be induced to remove the notion of reality from one's mind, which is possibly described as a form of schizophrenia.

To make a rectangular shape, many flat steel bars (3 millimetres, not 2, in thickness x 10 millimetres in width) were layered together in a manner that created interesting solid heaviness on the surface. However, the transition around the void space was unresolved because of disparate texture between the layered flat bar surface and the inside of the void space created out of the forged steel sheet. The texture subsequently interrupts the viewer's sight as they engage with the object as a whole.

This work directed focus on the head shape as well as the use of effective texture caused by the flat bars. The experiment of fitting one's head in the void space extended into the idea of my later work, *Structure, structured*.

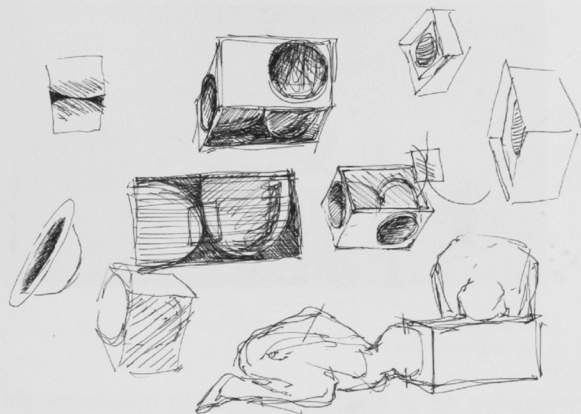


KOMORU, 2003
mild steel
87 x 57 x 117 cm



KOMORU performance

Two stones (Conflict)



Two heads in a box reveal the human condition of conflict: the strong compression in one's mind to merge two different opinions into one. However, this is a vain effort. More compression reveals the absolute difference in between. They are never combined.

From a technical viewpoint, the box is created with an eight millimeter steel plate. The original idea was to open one side, so the viewers could have seen two heads jammed in the box as well as the thickness of the steel plate. But the sense of compression is very important in this work. If one side were opened, the piece would have lost this sense and become too obvious. The completely enclosed steel plate box may arouse the viewer's curiosity to imagine what is happening inside. It was expected that the viewer would subconsciously recognize the heaviness and the thickness of the steel plate. In fact, it seemed to be affected by the edge of head part created with a forged steel sheet three millimeters in thickness, and the box is perceived as three millimeters in thickness.



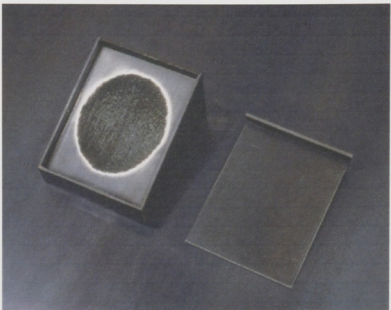
Two stones, 2003
mild steel
81 x 184.5 x 125 cm

The installation of this work needed to be considered. The size was unsuitable for floor presentation and lent itself to installation on a plinth. After the completion of the piece, the idea emerged of putting the piece on concrete pavements (30 x 30 centimeters). The grids created by concrete pavements seemed to imply an architectural space like a courtyard surrounded by buildings. Personally, this installation made the work more appealing as suggesting a particular space. Moreover, the reflection of the grids on the piece creates another world in the work.



Two stones performance

SAKUSHAHUMEI (Anonymous)



SAKUSHAHUMEI

The negative head shape is carved out of a solid steel block. Most previous completed pieces evoked human conditions, but this piece emphasizes the impression of a tool for meditation. The solid steel block, implies human thoughts, beliefs, desire, etc. within its heaviness. Putting a human head in the negative shape, the piece absorbs the whole notion of human feelings by its gravitation. The whole process of meditation is very important, like the Japanese tea ceremony: how to get into the space, how to sit in front of the piece, and how to open the lid and meditate.

The initial idea of presenting this work was to put the piece on a plinth that was going to be attached to the wall, so the viewer could closely see the detail of the steel sheet layers. But in that way, the work would be seen more emphatically as an art piece, like one in a museum. Then, the viewer would concentrate on the object itself rather than considering the surrounding space. I wanted to create an atmosphere in the space. Laying the waxed steel sheet on the floor is intended to imply a meditative pose, thus creating a contemplative environment.



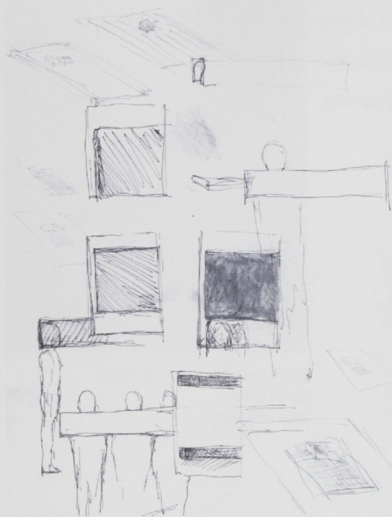
SAKUSHAHUMEI performance

However, representing the space with a steel sheet is still unresolved because of its materiality. It looks too cold and industrial, especially for stepping on. But unfortunately, a more suitable material has not been found.



SAKUSHAHUMEI, 2003, mild steel, 12.8 x 113 x 188 cm

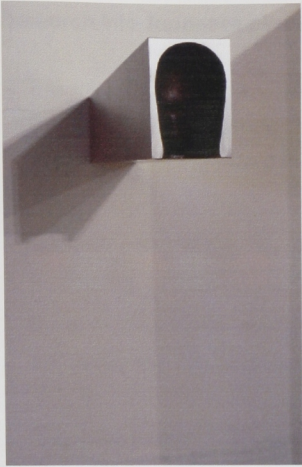
STRUCTURE STRUCTURED



This sculptural piece was produced as part of a performance piece. The length of the rectangle shape is five millimeters shorter than the width of the sculpture workshop corridor. One side is an almost exact hollow replica of the shape of my head. The original idea was to put my own head in the piece and mount the piece together with my body in the corridor. The purpose of this performance was to quasi-experience the contradictory feelings between existence and non-existence by partly becoming the building structure. This replicates the state of the human feelings of 'hollowness and nothingness.'

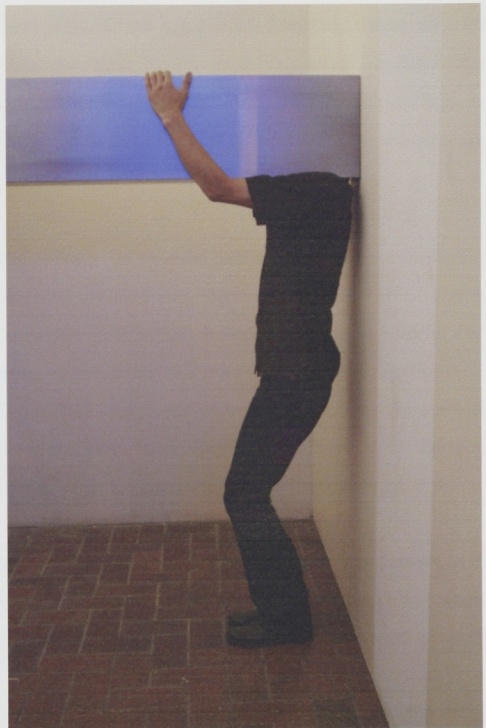
The inside of the steel was completely dark. It was hard to breathe, and the sound of my breathing echoed in the steel box. The assistants' voices sounded further away. There seemed to spread a dark infinite space in front of my eyes, meanwhile nothing existed in the world. However, the piece was too heavy to hold, and the process involved three assistants. Additionally, the five-millimeter gap was not enough to slide the piece in. At the end, the project had to be postponed because of safety issues.





Structure structured, 2003
mild steel
variable size

When the piece is exhibited in a gallery space, it is bolted to the wall with an internal structure. This creates tension between the piece and the floor due to its heaviness. Consequently, the work led my attention to the wall floor, the particular space where the wall meets the floor (Hashi: literally translated as corner).



Structure structured performance

Research into Japanese perception of space

The impression in the Church during my trip to Melbourne is still clear. It was my first time inside such an enormous church. As soon as I entered, I felt uplifted. Something absorbed my body from the top of the architecture.

Such an experience has never occurred to me in Japanese temples or shrines. In Japanese traditional architecture, the sensation goes down to the ground instead. The feeling is peaceful and quiet. Since the experience in Melbourne, my understanding of the dissimilar perception of space between Japanese and western viewpoints has deepened.

A hundred years ago, until the space concept was introduced from Europe, there was no equivalent concept for space in Japan. Space had been indistinguishable from the concept of time. Both elements were conceived together as Ma. Ma is the space or distance between two objects, and it is also the interval between two or more continuous events, activities, sounds etc.

Atsushi Ueda explains about the Japanese notion of space relating to the Japanese perception of soul. Originally, the idea of respect for the heavens did not exist in Japan. Japanese indigenous people thought that ghosts lived not in heaven, but beyond the ocean. The difference between the sacred axis, horizontally drawn in Japan and vertically in Europe. So the idea is based on respect for the earth or the ocean.⁷ This Japanese perception had naturally affected traditional architecture. Eaves had become deeper overtime, so the open space between inside and outside became horizontally elongated.

Most of my work gives the sense of being grounded on the floor, however, my awareness of the different special concepts in Western and Japanese culture began to infiltrate my work. Through research of Japanese concepts, stillness and quietness became more of a focal point for the body of work.

⁷ Ueda, Atsushi. Nihonjintosomei. Iwanamishinsho, 1974, p. 101, the personal translation

CHOZUYA



CHOZUYA
2003
mild steel
90 x 26 x 30 cm

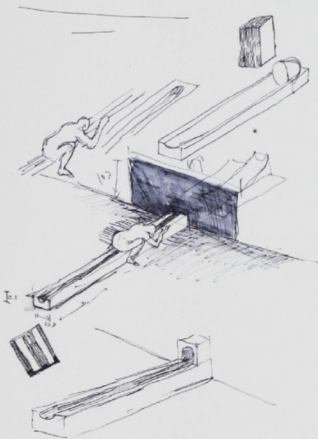
This shorter version of *Structure, structured* is layered only around the hollowed head shape with many steel sheets to simulate the object completed as a solid. The concept was inspired by Temizuya or Chozuya (the washbasin house in a shrine or a temple). The intention of the work is to give the impression of self-cleansing. Viewers are expected to imagine some kind of substance like sacred water or smoke in the void.

The body of work

At this point, in my investigation of self-acceptance I realized that achieving complete satisfaction and a peaceful mind is not easy. The subject is too immense to deal with. The barrier to investigating this area seems powerfully built, and too sinister or ominous to even approach. I considered shifting my focus, or continuing with the current idea of 'hollowness and nothingness.'

Ancient Japanese people believed that heaven existed beyond the ocean. And the heaven did really exist in people's mind. This made me consider my investigation in a new light, and I chose to focus on the relationship between the body/mind and spirit.

Hashi, Hashi, Hashi



The idea emerged from Komoru. As defined previously, it is physically and mentally impossible to cease the individual's existence, because the reality exists in one's mind. I questioned my understanding, and decided that, it is possible to obtain self-acceptance by disappearing from reality. What about the rest of the body and mind? Is a human really only a body and mind? This concept was demanding on both a spiritual and philosophical level.

My own idea of self-acceptance is seemingly possible under the condition of soul separation from the physical body and mind. This concept led to the idea of *Hashi, Hashi, Hashi*.

"Originally the word *hashi* referred not only to a bridge but also to an edge, chopsticks, steps, etc. The word did not mean a specific thing but rather implied the bridging of *Ma* (space between two objects). An edge represented the limit of one world, assuming the existence of another world beyond. Anything that crossed, filled, or projected into the chasm of *Ma* (space between two edges) was designated *hashi*. The "edges" bridged might include, for example, the secular world and heavenly world; the upper level and the lower level; the plate and the mouth (there is a homophone *hashi* in the Japanese

language that means chopsticks, an instrument that bridges the Ma between the plate and mouth). Ascending a bridge to reach the gods on high, marking boundaries by stretching ropes, embarking on the ship of the dead for the paradise beyond the seas, all these are *hashi*- the bridging of Ma."⁸

The shape of the channel within the three meters long rectangle piece was determined by the shape of a person's forehead. The idea being that the body moves towards the flat steel on the wall, that ambiguously shows another world on the surface. When the head hits the steel sheet, the separation occurs and the soul can keep moving further.

⁸ Isozaki, Arata. Mitateno Shuho, Kashimashuppankai, 1990, p.16

SHOSAIHUMEI (Unidentified)

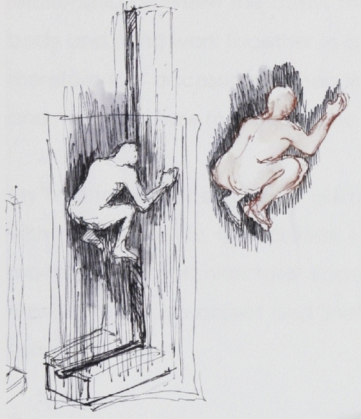
Such organic lines on both sides of the piece is not found in my previous works. The reason for the round shape is to give a sense of intimacy to the piece. This shape seems to create less tension in the space compared to the rectangular shape, but it is still based on the rectangular shape. The middle negative shape implies the entrance between this world and another world. The size of the piece is large enough to contain a human body.

In the sculptural piece, *Hashi, Hashi, Hashi*, the soul is assumed to disappear into/beyond the architecture. But in this piece, the soul is supposed to disappear into the object. The idea is still the same as *Hashi, Hashi, Hashi*. By dragging the head along the shaped channel, the soul is expected to be absorbed into the object.

The presentation of this work is controversial. I had originally intended to display it horizontally, but strong advice from my colleagues to display it vertically created indecision. Vertically, it gave a much stronger impression. Enormous steel walls expose the great dynamism, and it confronts the viewer. The body relationship is more strongly emphasized in this way. However, in presenting the work vertically the intention of the work to induce peace, quietness and stillness was lost. Moreover, this idea is based on the Japanese concept of space. Subsequently, considering the original idea and the aim of the expression, this piece is presented horizontally.

SHOTEN

This piece suggests the ascending human soul. When a head hits the corner, the separation occurs. The vertical part enables ascension. In terms of the idea, this piece could be read as based on Western spatial concepts, where we ascend to spirituality.



The perception of art

John Hutchinson writes, "Gormley believes that the artist is not a special kind of man, but that every man is a special kind of artist."⁹

Making art is a matter of discovery. When artists present their work they expose their philosophy. A viewer of the work may find their perception of the work differs from that of the artist. When this occurs and they can adopt the artist's view too/also, then the work exists as a work of art.

Art may be likened to a tool — a tool that develops an individual's perception of art — a tool that draws the viewer to find new perceptions. Artistic perception, like a religious belief, is a uniquely personal matter: if an artist clearly makes a personal perception available to the viewer, then that individual gains an essential connection with the artist to understand the nature of the work.

⁹ Hutchinson, John. Gombrich, E.H. Njatin, Lela B. Antony Gormley. London, Phaidon, 1995, p. 32

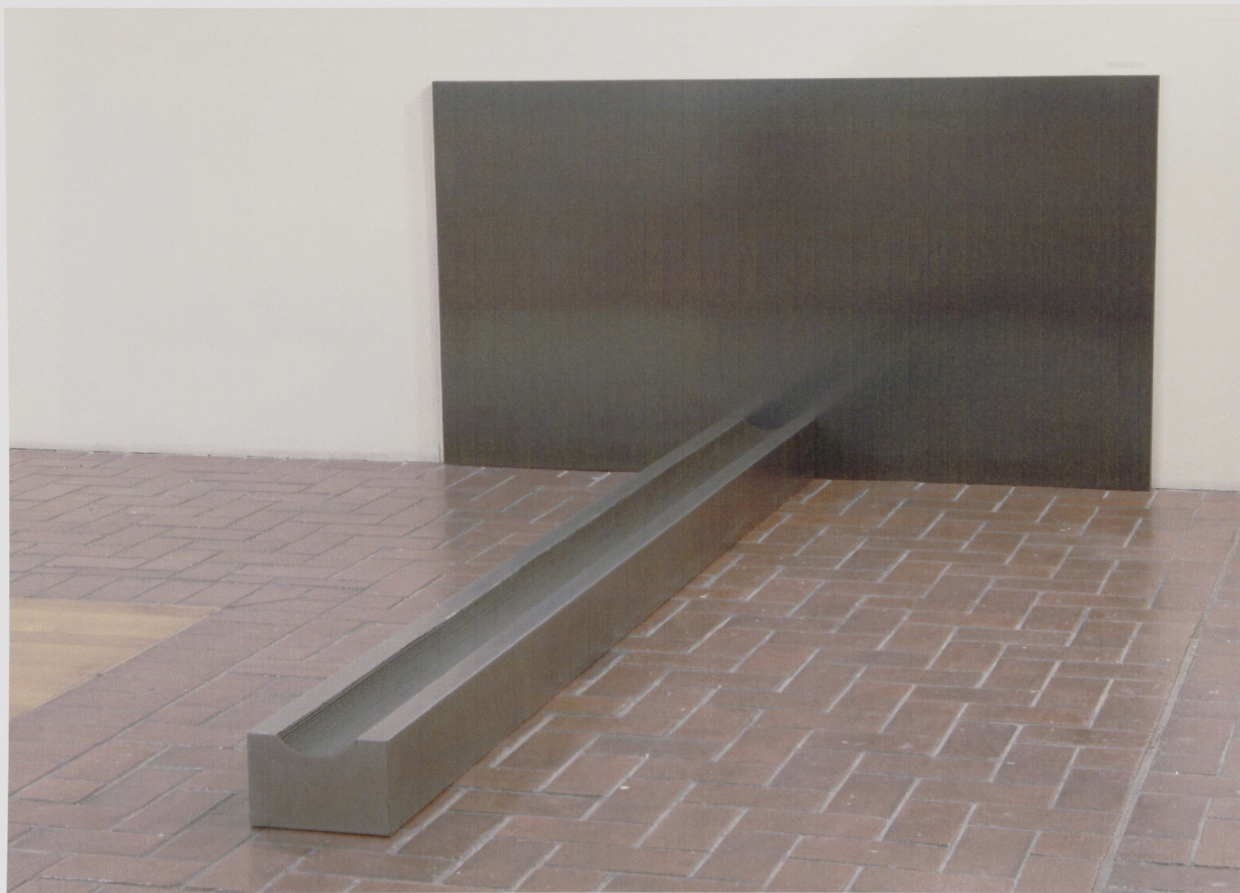
Conclusion

Further investigation of human feelings of hollowness and nothingness caused by self-negation lead me to consider the opposite, self-acceptance. I started thinking about the relationship between the body, the mind, and the spirit. This lead to the realization that the body and mind work together in a rational manner while the spirit is potentially irrational and therefore less accessible. I then started thinking about the relationship between the body and mind and how these could be used to gain access to the spirit.

My final three pieces of work demonstrate different ways in which the body and mind work with or connect to the spiritual. Hashi Hashi Hashi looks at how the spirit and body/mind move through architectural space. Shosaihumei looks at how the spirit and body/mind move through an object and Shoten looks at how the spirit and body/mind move through space.

This seemed to be the crucial question when investigating the state of self-acceptance. The process also became very important. In making these works I found that time was a critical part of the experience. Not just the physical time but the perception and understanding of how this time can affect human feelings and self-acceptance. For example, the personal process of sanding the plaster piece by hand may be seen as wasting time to some people, whilst it seems very meaningful to another. Things are ambiguous. For me, this process often caused alternate feelings of self-doubt and self-trust. How meaningful is the process? One day, the question was answered for me. 'I am experiencing time. I am not spending time making a great sculpture. Probably, I will find something from this process whether it is a small thing or a big thing, but the critical thing is found in the process and the time'.

This written sentence may be the thing that is found from the process. And this is how I have accepted the process and time.



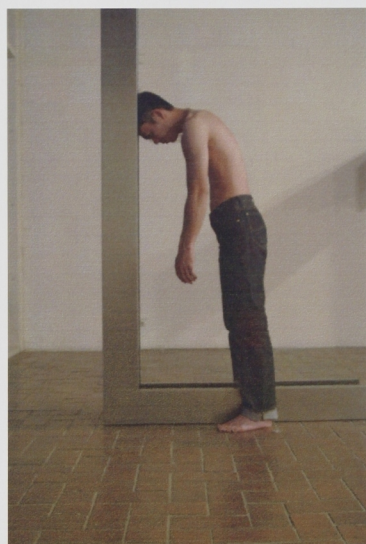
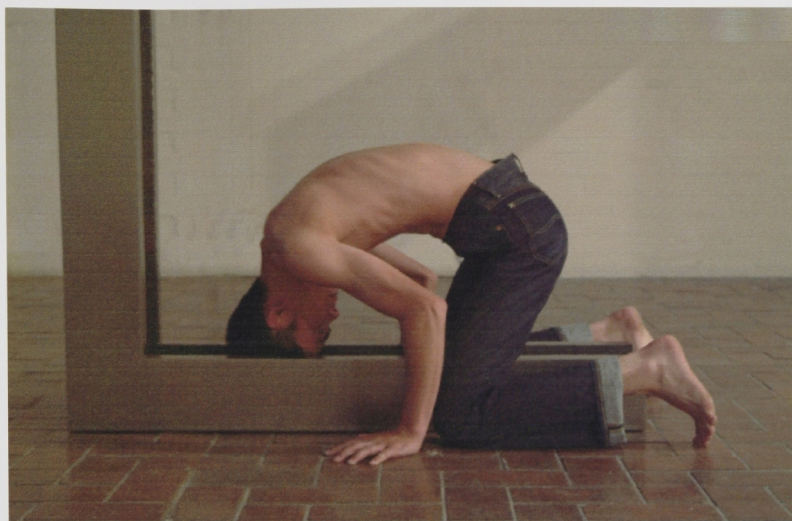
HASHI HASHI HASHI, 2003, mild steel, 103 x 189 x 313 cm



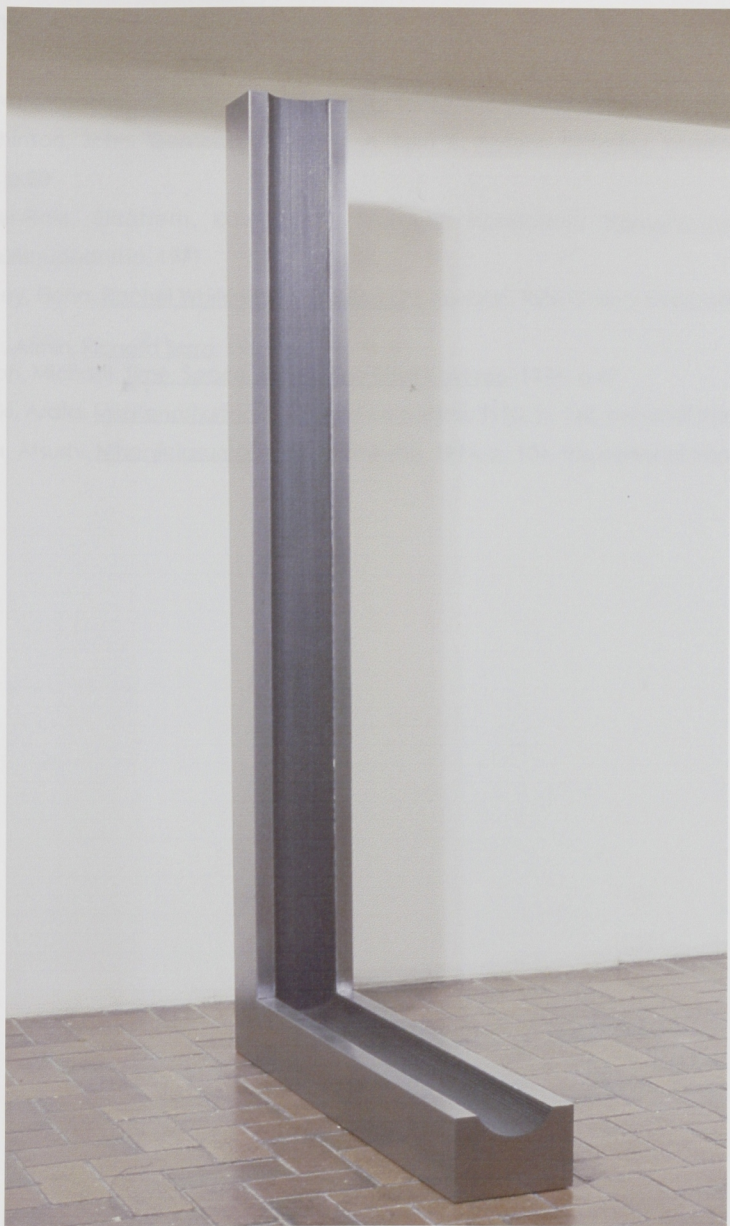
Hashi Hashi Hashi performance



SHOSAIHUMEI, 2003, mild steel, 28 x 123 x 253.5 cm



SHOTEN performance



SHOTEN, 2003
mild steel
220 x 24 x 121.5 cm

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Curriculum Vitae

Born 1975, Kyoto, Japan

Education

- 2003 Candidate Master of Arts (Visual Art)
- 2002 Master of Visual Arts School of Arts, National Institute of the Arts, ANU
- 2001 Bachelor of Arts (Visual) Kyoto Seika University, Japan
- 1999-2000 Exchange program School of Arts, National Institute of the Arts, ANU

Solo exhibition

- 2000 *Kensuke Todo The works in Australia*, Gallery ITEZA, Japan

Selected Group exhibitions

- 2004 *Horizons*, Gallery Canberra School of Art, ANU
- 2003 *The Annual 6" Miniature Sculpture Show 2003*, Defiance Gallery, Sydney
- 2003 *Witnessing to Silence: Art and Human Rights*, Canberra School of Art Foyer Gallery
- 2003 *new sculpture, new contemporaries*, Sydney
- 2002 *Oxygen*, Gallery Canberra School of Art, ANU
- 2001 Group exhibition, final year students, Kyoto Seika University
- 1999 *Gulaga 8*, Foyer Gallery, Canberra School of Art, ANU

Master of Art (Visual Arts) study proposal

Kensuke Todo

Student number/ 3253770

24, September, 02

Subject

'My research confirms the legitimacy and the value of art as a vehicle for expression. I contend that human beings, both consciously and subconsciously, try to avoid the physical places that evoke negative feelings of what I describe as 'hollowness and nothingness'. I will continue to investigate this idea through my MAVA project. By investigating of this idea further, I will hopefully understand why people are willing to accept this feeling of 'hollowness and nothingness'.

I am going to approach this idea in terms of 'self-abnegation and the reality', relating it on my own life experience. I will evoke this idea into my sculpture in abstract way in which the form comes from the movement, the pose, the part of human body, or the space surrounding the human society.

Also I am going to continue the investigation of negative expression of my sculpture which I believe that the audience feel the force to confront themselves.

I am going to take the positive aspects out as much as possible. So it will be expressed as minimal form.

This project is not only for developing my individual pieces, but also for understanding of my 'self-acceptance'. To me, art is my self-discovering.

Methods and Materials

I am going to make a major sculpture at the end of the year. This sculpture will combine the whole ideas of what I have researched during the year. Every researching works, experiments, and drawings will be created for the major sculpture.

I intend to employ forged steel sheet as my material. Also thinking of combination with stone. I will be able to contemplate the shape of my sculpture by hammering process such as forming gradually. This process can create organic shape that shows strong contrast against industrial flat steel sheet. I am going to create sculptures dealing with this contrast as a individual aesthetic.

As my starting point, I prefer to draw my idea as well as liberally research. Touching materials also makes me discover its own quality and aspect. Going through this process, I will make my idea more definite.

References

I am still interested in negative space and positive space that I had investigated through the MVA project in 2001. I am going to research artists who are dealing with positive or negative space very closely in philosophical or physical way. For example Rachel Whiteread's idea is completely opposite from mine such as revealing as positive space which is supposed to exist as negative in our life. Or Anish Kapoor represents his negative idea as negative space.

Also I am still interested in Minimalist. Those artists hopefully help and develop my attempt farther to understand of the essence of existence of objects and the relationship between object and the space.

In terms of investigating of materials, I am going to research the artists who are like Ulrich Ruckriem such as focusing on to its own quality of the surface of material.

With reference to philosophical way, I intend to research about Buddhism to get to know how it tells about reaching to self-acceptance, because I found there is similarity in my idea. It will also be the opportunity to think of my question that art should still be related to religion.



Horizons, Final Graduate Exhibition at Canberra School of Art Foyer Gallery